

Bolivia

Facts & Statistics

Location: Central South America, southwest of Brazil

Bordering Countries: Argentina 832 km, Brazil 3,400 km, Chile 861 km, Paraguay 750 km, Peru 900 km

Population: 8,857,870 (July 2005 est.)

Ethnic Groups: Quechua 30%, mestizo (mixed white and Amerindian ancestry) 30%, Aymara 25%, white 15%

Religion: Roman Catholic 95%, Protestant (Evangelical Methodist) 5%

Language in Bolivia

Spanish is the main and official language of Bolivia. However there are some 39 other living languages used in the country spoken by people in different regions. Examples include Aymara, Chiquitano, Chiriguano and Guyara. Some 50% of the population have an indigenous language as their mother tongue.

Bolivian Spanish as a result of mixing with its indigenous rivals differs from region to region. The vocabulary and pronunciation differs according to where in Bolivia you are, i.e. highlands (Altiplano and valleys) or the lowlands (Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando).

Bolivian Society & Culture

Religion

- . Most Bolivians are born into Roman Catholicism.
- . Religion tends to be a female dominated activity in terms of attending church and the like.
- . Catholicism to some extent has been "localised" as it became intertwined with local folklore and customs in its early years of taking root in the country.

The Family

- . The family is the axis of the social life and structure.
- . Families are very tight knit and in rural areas, many generations still often live together in one house.
- . The extended family or "familia" serves as a strong support and network system.
- . Roles within the family are very traditional - "Machismo" is very much alive.
- . The wife is generally responsible for domestic duties whereas the husband will be the bread winner.
- . The machismo mentality often translates into a feeling of male superiority and a strong sense of honour which means maintaining face/dignity at all cost.

Classes

- . Due to Bolivia's history a number of differing ethnic groups have converged which now form a class system.
- . Bolivia is basically made up of a small number of whites, a larger group of 'mestizos' (intermarriage of whites with indigenous Indians), a majority of native Indians ('Quechua' or 'Aymara') and a small number of blacks who are descended from the slaves imported during the Spanish colonial period.
- . Traditionally the whites minority occupy the top rung on the class ladder. This is mainly due to socioeconomic factors rather than skin colour.